

SO NEAR TO VICTORY OVER CHAMPIONS

Wycombe hearts sink as Enfield bring them back into line

Wycombe Wanderers 1, Enfield 2

ON THE VERGE of forging a breakaway gap at the head of the Isthmian League, Wycombe Wanderers were cruelly yanked back into line in five soul-shattering minutes under the Loakes Park floodlights on Tuesday.

What must have been in the region of 3,000 hearts skipped countless beats as the Blues, one up and masters of the night, flung themselves at Enfield's net in chase of a second and deciding goal.

Then twice, after 85 minutes, and — cruellest of all — only seconds from full time, the visitors re-claimed their right to the title of champions . . . close on 3,000 hearts sank.

CLOSING IRONY

By that closing irony, the entire course of this season's Isthmian League campaign might have been changed. For, at Hendon, Sutton (one point behind Wycombe after Saturday) were held to a goalless draw; at Tooting, surprise-team Woking (also previously on eight) fell 2-0; and that, but for five minutes, would have meant Wanderers opening up an important two point lead over allcomers.

Instead the fat is once more back in the fire with eight clubs pacing each other in the craziest August scramble for Isthmian points in years.

Now no side remains unbeaten. But how ironic that Wanderers, the last of the undefeated clubs, should lose their distinction after so clearly taming the champions. And, with the memory of that Ilford yawn still in mind.

There was however more than enough goalmouth incident and excitement to have blown away every last cobweb from Saturday.

On a drizzly evening, the early bantering ended when Lou Temel sent a free kick over for John Delaney to force Enfield's keeper, Wolstenholme to punch his header onto the bar in the 20th minute.

From that moment, Wanderers meant business, and three minutes later, only a referee's whistle saved their visitors as Tony Horseman caused havoc inside the defence.

SIGNS OF PANIC

At times there were clear signs of panic from Enfield's backrow, who almost succumbed when Barry Baker drove only just high from 20 yards plus, to finish a quickfire Julian Lailey - Geoff Anthony movement on the left.

It was the quiet maestro, Lailey who simply oozed "man of the match".

But, Anthony too, returning from holiday and selected in place of Keith Samuels, offered speed and determination that made him Wycombe's most industrious front runner.

Kevin O'Brien took over the goalkeeper's jersey for the second time this term, when John Maskell reported with an eye injury incurred at work.

The former Chesham man, whose last appearance was in the five goal Mithras cup nightmare at Dagenham, also had his fair share of action . . . and coped with decision and often, bravery, against an Enfield strike line that tended to move out from the shadows.

INCREDIBLE

Having been held somewhat incredibly to a goalless home draw by Dulwich Hamlet on Saturday, Enfield came to Loakes Park for a point, and must have been well satisfied with the blank state of affairs at the interval.

Wanderers had been perhaps too anxious in the first half, but in a fast, latter period of good standard football, Enfield's hopes took a quick if temporary nosedive. After Hatt had had Wolstenholme punching a powerful drive over the bar in the 54th minute, two minutes later, Wycombe took the lead.

Receiving from Ken Ward, Hatt needed on to Tony Horseman in front of the line, for Wanderers' centre forward to score a goal memorable more for the speed with which it was pressed home, than anything.

O'Brien jumped fearlessly into a pack of white shirts to cut out a corner as Enfield retaliated.

But, as Lailey and Delaney stood firm, and Adams tried his hand unsuccessfully twice, Wycombe were soon back in the ascendancy.

OPENED CRACKS

The sheer strain opened cracks in Enfield's defensive network, with Wanderers hotfoot on the trail of another goal. But, unfortunately the Blues were carried away by their enthusiasm, and lost all caution for their own defence.

The lesson they learnt came the hard way, as Enfield taught them that champions win games after 90 minutes — not before.

Five minutes from time, the match was as good as sewn up. Seconds later it was ripped apart at the seam when O'Brien and a host of blue shirts failed to intercept a corner from the left and, visiting centre forward Hill was subsequently positioned to equalise.

Almost into injury time, the points were sewn up again, only this time inside out, when Wanderers defence was caught at a lax moment, leaving Fry unmarked on the far side of goal, to bang in following a cross, once more off the left.

A final comment from Wycombe's ever-realistic manager Brian Lee: "We've done it to Hitchin and done it to Sutton, now we know how it feels. We made mistakes, they took advantage of them."

Wycombe: K. O'Brien; I. Rundle, L. Temel; J. Lailey, J. Delaney, K. Ward; L. Worley, B. Baker, A. Horseman, R. Hatt, G. Anthony. Sub: K. Samuels (not used).

Enfield: I. Wolstenholme; P. Fry, L. Commons; J. Payne, P. Betsion, R. Day; J. Adams, G. Clayton, R. Hill, B. Terry, L. Varney. Sub: L. Peddie (not used).